

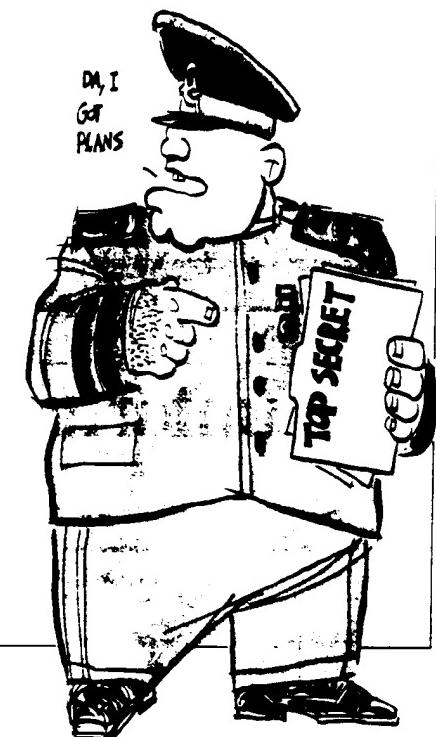
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WASHINGTON TIMES

6 November 1985

## J ELMO ZUMWALT/ WORTH BAGLEY J

HOW COME WHEN  
SOME GUY SELLS  
HIGHLY CLASSIFIED  
INFORMATION  
TO THE ENEMY  
IT'S TREASON AND  
THERE'S TALK OF  
THE DEATH PENALTY  
FOR SPYING IN  
PEACE TIME...



BUT WHEN SOME  
OTHER BOZO  
GIVES THE SAME  
KIND OF STUFF  
TO A NEWSPAPER  
WE ONLY HEAR  
ABOUT "THE PEOPLE'S  
RIGHT TO KNOW"?



## COMFORT FOR OUR ENEMIES

J Last Sunday, *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward published a story about a covert operation supported by the administration and designed to undermine the Libyan regime headed by Col. Muammar Qaddafi. The information was given to Mr. Woodward by "informed government sources."

We question the judgment exercised by both Mr. Woodward and *The Washington Post* in publishing infor-

**How far must the unrestrained news journalist be permitted to go before he is held accountable for actions which do more harm than good to our national security interests?**

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mation which impacts so heavily on our national security and on our efforts to combat international terrorism. We would not have written the story.

Twenty to 30 years ago, no responsible journalist would have printed information of this nature without first checking with the administration to ascertain what damage would be done to our security by its release.

The media today seems blinded by a competitive spirit in which a constant emphasis is placed on being the first to break "the big news story." However, one must ask how far the unrestrained news journalist must be permitted to go before he is

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held accountable for actions which do more harm than good to our national security interests.

While efforts to curtail the publication of state secrets have, in recent years, been quickly met with cries of freedom-of-speech infringement and the public's right to know, there comes a time when one in the media must be charged with the responsibility — ethically and morally — of undertaking his own damage assessment as to the impact the publication of such sensitive information will have on his country's national security.

We believe Mr. Woodward and *The Washington Post* either made no effort to undertake such a prior damage assessment or, if they did, their assessment was grossly flawed.

The freedom-of-speech concerns raised in opposition to efforts in this country to impose government sanctions against the release of such information, we believe, are unfounded. Other democracies, such as Great Britain, have found it necessary to pass legislation aimed at inhibiting the publication of state secrets and have not suffered unduly as a result.

In the final analysis, such legislation became necessary because the media, as a commercial enterprise, proved to be motivated more by bottom-line profits than by any commitment to national interests. The end result was that national security suffered while the reporting of state secrets flourished.

As the industry proved unable to impose voluntary restraints upon itself, the British government was compelled to impose involuntary ones on the industry's behalf. Free speech has not suffered.

In the case at hand, if one removes the profit motive, there is absolutely no sound basis for opting to disclose secret information about the administration's plans to frustrate Qaddafi's subversive and terrorist activities around the world. In Qaddafi, we have a man who has demonstrated on many occasions his total lack of respect for international law and order, except when it was in his own interest to do so. His assassination "hit squads" have murdered Libyan exiles who criticized his regime from abroad; his embassy staff used the cloak of diplomatic immu-

nity to escape responsibility for the death of a policewoman in London; he continues to give financial and moral support to international terrorists.

The CIA plan reported in *The Post* did not propose the assassination of Qaddafi. Rather, it sought to give active support to Qaddafi's opponents in a judicious effort to tumble him from power — an effort made nearly impossible by *The Post's* disclosure.

We know from our own service in the government that there are those in the media who have placed such restraints upon themselves voluntarily.

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This was demonstrated just last month when a news agency received a report hours before U.S. forces intercepted the Egyptian airliner which was carrying the Achille Lauro hijackers to safety that the operation was going to occur. A ham radio operator who had been monitoring conversations between President Reagan and Secretary of Defense Weinberger (both of whom were airborne at the time) over an unsecured line about the proposed operation was the source of the information.

The news agency, to its credit, assessed that far greater virtue lay in striking a blow against terrorism and not endangering the U.S. forces charged with responsibility for delivering that blow than lay in being the first to break "the big story."

It is regrettable that in the present case, instead of exercising similar wisdom, Mr. Woodward and *The Post* gave great aid and comfort to the enemy.